

By Cdr. Peter B. Mersky, USNR (Ret.)

Knott, Richard C. *A Heritage of Wings: An Illustrated History of Navy Aviation*. U.S. Naval Institute, 118 Maryland Ave., Annapolis, MD 21402. 1997. 360 pp. Ill. \$49.95.

A retired captain and Naval Aviator, this author has given us a well-written popular history of Navy aviation. (The emphasis is important because there is very little on Marine Corps or Coast Guard aviation.) With more than 86 years to describe, he manages to squeeze it all in with style, knowledge and humor, as well as a distinct sense of the American experience in seaborne aviation.

The text is not just another listing of facts, dates and figures. An accomplished author, Capt. Knott has melded a familiar story into a smooth, fleshed-out history that both the serious researcher and enthusiast can appreciate.

His accounts of the nearly disastrous (for the U.S.) first day of the Battle of Midway is one of the best I've read. Likewise, his discussion of the Battle of the North Atlantic, the postwar development of carriers in the 1950s, and especially the chapter on Vietnam are models of the historian's art from someone who has seen the subject firsthand.

The author flew some of the Navy's last flying boats, and even flew a tour in Vietnam as a P-3 *Orion* commander. During one mission, enemy ground fire shot out one of his plane's engines during a low-level night inspection of suspicious activity along a beach.

Many of the book's 194 photographs have not appeared before, especially those in the pre-WW II chapters. The nine maps that accompany the text are large, with clear type, although the heavily screened water and land tones are hard to look at.

This book took a long time to research and write, but the results are well worth the author's hard work.

Engen, Donald D. *Wings and Warriors: My Life as a Naval Aviator*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 470 L'Enfant Plaza, Washington, DC 20560. 1997. 341 pp. Ill. \$29.95.

Joining the growing list of memoirs from WW II Naval Aviators, this long-awaited account details the incredible career of one of this country's most experienced naval officers and airmen. *Wings and Warriors* is one man's history of Naval Aviation as he lived it. A retired vice admiral, one-time head of the Federal Aviation Administration and currently Director of the National Air and Space Museum, Don Engen began his Navy life during WW II in Bombing Squadron 19 aboard

Lexington (CV 16) flying SB2C-3 *Helldivers*.

Leaving the Navy briefly after the war, he re-upped and began a long career as a jet test pilot. After combat in Korea, he spent time with Britain's Empire Test Pilot School developing a new carrier landing system, followed by tours with Experimental Squadron 3, the Naval Air Test Center and as CO of Fighting Squadron 21. During his command of Carrier Air Group 11 in the early 1960s, Engen alerted the Navy to the value of flight deck crews by devising a schedule of hazardous-duty pay for their work in all types of weather and operational conditions. If you aviation boatswain's mates ever wondered how you started getting the extra "skins," this naval officer is one of those responsible.

Wings and Warriors does have its flaws, with some typos and editing problems, but the photo collection is good. Each chapter has an introduction that sets the stage for the narrative. The book ends with what the author obviously feels is a career high point—command of *America* (CVA 66). Engen took the carrier into the Mediterranean in time to be on station when the intelligence ship *Liberty* (AGTR 5) was attacked by Israeli aircraft and ships on 8 June 1967 during the Six Day War.

This book is a deeply personal account of American Naval Aviation, including the thrills and bottomless pits that people experience in a long and colorful career. You can't rush through it. Its author wanted to tell you his story as surrounded by the events that shaped the world and his career.

Gall, Jean-Marie. *Les Crusader Francais en Action*.

LELA Presse, 39 rue Aristide Briand, 62200 Boulogne sur Mer, France. 1997. 272 pp. Ill. \$54 (plus \$6 S&H).

An unexpected treat for an acknowledged *Crusader*-phile, this well-done book is written by an experienced French *Crouze* driver and illustrated with many of his own photographs. Gall is the 188th designated F-8E (FN) pilot out of 248, whose numbers date back to May 1963. The Aeronavale of the French navy currently boasts more than a half-dozen pilots with more than 2,000 hours in the F-8; an added surprise is that at least another half-dozen *enlisted* pilots have accumulated more than 1,000 hours.

Gall's book gives modelers a new area to explore—the aircraft, markings and colors, uniforms and flight gear of Aeronavale aviators and the colorfully marked flight deck of the small French carriers, which are reminiscent of U.S. 27C *Essex*-class ships. Although the main text is in French, the book has an English translation in the back and alongside many photo captions.

There is a nice balance of color and black-and-white photos, and several tables and schematics that complement the text and photos. I highly recommend this book.

Dean, Francis. *America's Hundred-Thousand: U.S. Production Fighters of World War Two*. Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 4880 Lower Valley Rd., Atglen, PA 19310. 1997. 607 pp. Ill. \$59.95.

Presenting familiar material in a new way, this massive book describes the design, development and operational careers of the 11 main Army and Navy fighters of the war. There are numbers and tables to satisfy the most diehard bean-counter, and the text tells each fighter's story from the first blueprint to its most important missions.

After an introductory chapter with summaries of each type's qualities and effect on the war, the book moves on to the concepts and requirements of the period that gave birth to the particular aircraft. There is an overview of prewar fighter development, which focuses on the fact that the Army participated in more experimentation than the Navy.

For the technically oriented reader, there is an unusual dissection of the prominent power plants used in these fighters, and a short course on aerodynamics as it applied to high-performance piston-engine fighters of the time.

Francis Dean has done a credible job of drawing together a huge dossier of facts and figures for each aircraft. This book provides a lot of refreshing information.

Stout, Jay. *Hornets Over Kuwait*. Naval Institute Press, 118 Maryland Ave., Annapolis, MD 21402. 1997. 256 pp. Ill. \$28.95.

Written in the brusque language of youth, this wartime memoir is the first in-depth look at the F/A-18 *Hornet* at war. As such, it occupies a unique place and should be read by everyone with an interest in Naval Aviation in the Gulf War.

The writing style is bombastic and in desperate need of a good editor, which impeded my enjoyment and understanding of the author's story. However, this book is probably the best description to date of the *Hornet's* capabilities and operations. There's humor, too, as Maj. Stout describes setting up shop during Desert Shield and finally, with the war well underway, how an F/A-18D backseater tries to tell his incoming strikers about their target: "[There's] stuff underneath some camouflage netting.' That was good enough for us. You can't run a war without good stuff, and we were just the group of guys to deny the enemy his stuff."

A good weekend read, *Hornet Over Kuwait* fills a gap that has been open a long time.

Tillman, Barrett. *U.S. Navy Fighter Squadrons in WW II—Chronology, Deployments, Combat Records*. Specialty Press, 11481 Kost Dam Rd., North Branch, MN 55056. 1997. 160 pp. Ill. \$22.95.

This latest book by one of the country's best aviation historians is a handy reference. It offers the reader and serious researcher a pleasant browse, in addition to a ready source of information. Companion volumes on Marine Corps fighter squadrons, as well as Navy and Marine Corps bomber squadrons, would make a great compact series.

Those readers with more than a passing knowledge of Naval Aviation will be surprised to discover where some well-known personalities spent less-publicized portions of their wartime careers. A poignant note is the high number of pilots lost during the combat deployments described in these thumbnail sketches. It was not unusual for a large number of men to fail to come home from the three-year operating periods of most of the F4F *Wildcat*, F6F *Hellcat* and F4U *Corsair* squadrons included in the book.

Tillman's knowledge of "aceology" allows him to include a series of interesting appendices and ace biographies which round out the narrative.

Moore, John, Cdr., USN (Ret.). *The Wrong Stuff—Flying on the Edge of Disaster*. Specialty Press, 11481 Kost Dam Rd., North Branch, MN 55056. 1997. 214 pp. Ill. \$19.95.

Having survived a number of emergencies in the air, as well as a flight deck mishap in 1951 that left him badly burned, Cdr. Moore tells a tough, but evocative story. In recent columns I've noted the steady stream of memoirs coming from the WW II–Korea generation Naval Aviator, and this new book fits in that category.

Using for its title an obvious counter to another well-known history of test pilots, *The Wrong Stuff* has several very good descriptions of flying the last prop fighters and the early jets. After flying F9F-2 *Panthers* with Fighter Squadron 51 during the Korean War, Moore became a test pilot at the Naval Air Test Center before going to North American where he flew such types as the A-5 *Vigilante* and T-2 *Buckeye*.

His narrative is filled with humor, as well as professional and personal philosophies about his work and the people he met throughout his career. He finishes with a brief discussion of his time with NASA's Apollo program, including the tragic fire in January 1967 that erupted on the launch pad, killing three astronauts in the Apollo 1 spacecraft. But his most poignant writing comes in the final pages of the book as he relates his wife's death in an automobile accident during a family outing.

The author crammed a lot of experience into this relatively short book, but the reader will enjoy the ride.